The instinct for fight, flight, or freeze and the ‘Wild Boar’ tale
Part 1 of the ‘Stress Management, Empathy, & Anger Control’ series

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Several of the Anger management concepts originate with the Anger Coach, Dr. Tony Fiore, and are used with his permission. Dr. Fiore is a Licensed Psychologist & Author of course called “Martial Arts Educator Certification.”

11 Male Actors: Nick Randy Blake Mr. Campbell Jared Cave Man Bill Tall Man Fred Short Man Doug
7 Female Actors: Trixie Cathy Monica Tall Man Miss Debbie Daphne Martha
2 or more Narrators: Guys or Girls

Narrator 1: There are pivotal events that happen in this country that impacts us all. The Connecticut school shooting that happened on the 14th of December, 2012, is one of those events.

Narrator 2: In an effort to bring comfort, understanding, and a way to help us deal with our feelings of stress, empathy, and anger, this series has been created.

Narrator 3: This is an excerpt from a role-play about anti-bullying. Just the part about the instinct for fight, flight, or freeze and the tale about the wild boar are included.

Narrator 4: Mr. Campbell, the Communication Skills teacher, said:

MR. CAMPBELL: Welcome, Class. We have a very special guest today. Her name is Debbie Dunn. She is not only a Professional Storyteller, she is also a Conflict Resolution Specialist. Welcome, Miss Debbie.

Narrator 5: The class looked on in expectation as she walked to the front of the room.

MISS DEBBIE: Hi, Guys. I am here to tell you a story that ties in to the subject you have been discussing lately: FIGHT, FLIGHT, or FREEZE.

MR. CAMPBELL: Before Miss Debbie starts her story, what does that phrase mean?

NICK: The FIGHT part means to fight somebody or to hit, kick, or push.

MR. CAMPBELL: Okay, that is typically the more negative way of FIGHTING. What is the more positive way of FIGHTING?

TRIXIE: FIGHT can also be like someone is FIGHTING to accomplish a goal or FIGHTING to finish a task. They’re working really hard to get this done.

FRED: Yeah, like every night, I have to FIGHT to get my homework done ‘cuz I’d much rather be watching TV.

Narrator 2: The class laughed in appreciation. Mr. Campbell said:
MR. CAMPBELL: Good. Let’s discuss the FLIGHT option. How would you describe how that works?

CATHY: FLIGHT is when someone gets hysterical or runs away or gives up or quits.

FRED: Ohhhhh! Like if I didn’t do my homework, I would be … FLIGHTING from it?

Narrator 0: Cathy and the rest of the class laughed at his wit. Cathy said:

CATHY: Yup! You’d be a FLIGHTER instead of a FIGHTER.

MISS DEBBIE: Mr. Campbell. I’m enjoying the wit of your class.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yes. I enjoy them too. Okay, what about the FREEZE option? How would you describe how that works?

BILL: FREEZE is like when someone gets so stressed that they just shut down completely.

MISS DEBBIE: Mr. Campbell, have you given the class the cave man example for FIGHT, FLIGHT, or FREEZE?

MR. CAMPBELL: Not yet. I would appreciate it if you start by telling them that little story.

MISS DEBBIE: Okay. Back in the Cave Man days, when a Cave Man heard a twig snap, he would quickly look around. He might say:

CAVE MAN: Phew! No big deal! It’s just a squirrel. Back to work!

MISS DEBBIE: And he goes back to doing whatever he was doing. A little while later, the Cave Man heard a twig snap a second time. He quickly looks around. This time, he sees a Saber-Tooth Tiger. He might gasp and say:

CAVE MAN: Ahhhh! It’s a Saber-Tooth Tiger! What am I going to do?

MISS DEBBIE: Okay, Class. What are his choices?

NICK: He could try to FIGHT the Saber-Tooth Tiger.

JARED: He could do that FLIGHT thing by trying to run like crazy, hoping he can outrun the tiger.

MONICA: Or he might just FREEZE up because he is so petrified with fear.

MISS DEBBIE: Excellent. That Cave Man probably got that adrenaline rush feeling in his gut when he saw that Saber-Tooth Tiger. That adrenaline rush feeling
MISS DEBBIE: is our body’s way of giving us the energy to either try to FIGHT off the tiger or to try to outrun the tiger.

MR. CAMPBELL: How many of you now have a better understanding about FIGHT, FLIGHT, or FREEZE?

Narrator ө: Most of the class raised their hands.

MR. CAMPBELL: Now, Miss Debbie, please tell us the other story. Class, please notice whether the characters in her story use the FIGHT option, the FLIGHT option, or the FREEZE option. Miss Debbie, we’re ready for you to begin.

MISS DEBBIE: Years ago, I traveled to the country of Norway on a college abroad. One of the girls was doing a number of things to make me feel very annoyed and upset. I went to my good friend, Sandy, and started complaining.

In response, Sandy told me the following story called “The Wild Boar.” When the story is done, see if you can guess why she chose to tell me this particular story.

Narrator ө: Here is the story of the Wild Boar. The original author is unknown.

Narrator ө: There was once a tall man and a short man walking through the forest. All of a sudden, a wild boar came running up, ready to charge those two men.

Narrator ө: The tall man climbed up into a tree. The short man could not reach the lowest branch. Fortunately, he found a large hole in the ground and dived down into it.

Narrator ө: The wild boar snuffled around, tearing up the ground. He couldn’t reach the tall man. He couldn’t find the short man.

Narrator ө: He was just about to wander off when ... the short man popped out of the hole.

Narrator ө: Needless to say, the wild boar charged after that short man. Just in the nick of time, the short man dived back down into the hole.
Narrator 1: Once again, the wild boar snuffled around, tearing up the ground. He couldn’t reach the tall man. He couldn’t find the short man.

Narrator 2: He was just about to wander off when ... the short man popped out of that hole again.

Narrator 1: This, of course, reactivated the wild boar’s interest. The boar charged. Just in the nick of time, the short man once again dived back down into the hole.

Narrator 2: The short man popped out of that hole again and again. Each time, the wild boar would turn and charge.

Narrator 1: Finally, the wild boar got disgusted with the whole useless effort and ran off.

Narrator 2: When the coast was clear, the tall man climbed down out of the tree. For the very last time, the short man climbed out of the hole. The tall man snapped:

TALL MAN: You fool! Why did you keep popping out of that hole the way you did over and over and over again?

SHORT MAN: Well, ..., you see, ..., there was a ..., tiger in the hole.

Narrator 1: There was silence. Then, some students said, “Ohhhhh!” in understanding. Other students, like Judd, Nick and Blake, looked totally blank. Nick said:

NICK: I don’t get it.

MR. CAMPBELL: Who gets the point of this story?

BONNIE: I think I get it. The tall man was up in the tree thinking that the short man was dim-witted or something because he kept popping out of the hole before the wild boar had run away.
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TRIXIE: Then, when the short man revealed that there was a tiger in the hole, the tall man realized he had totally misjudged him.

MR. CAMPBELL: What do you think was going on in the short man’s mind?

DOUG: Well, it’s like this whole predator and prey tale. This predator, the wild boar, wants to kill his two prey: the tall man and the short man. The tall man is able to climb to safety. The short man must have been really frustrated that he couldn’t do the same. Then he saw the hole and dived down into it, figuring that he would be safe.

CATHY: Yeah, I get it. That short man probably was standing there in that hole waiting until the wild boar ran away. Suddenly, he hears growling going on behind him. He whips around and sees a tiger getting ready to pounce. So of course, the short man has no choice. He has to pop out of the hole to escape the tiger predator.

DOUG: Yup! Only problem was, the wild boar predator wanted to kill him as well.

CATHY: Yeah! So he has to keep trying to escape from both predators until one of them goes away for good.

MR. CAMPBELL: Excellent! Now before we go on with that discussion, let’s discover how this story ties in to our lesson about FIGHT, FLIGHT, or FREEZE. Just like the Cave Man with the Saber-Toothed Tiger, when the Wild Boar appeared, both the tall man and the short man got that adrenaline rush feeling. Who remembers what that adrenaline rush feeling does for us?

DAPHNE: It’s our body giving us the energy to get away or to do what we need to do to best survive the situation.

MR. CAMPBELL: Good! Now look at our FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE-SELF MENTOR poster. Where on the continuum did the tall man fall?

NICK: He did that FIGHT thing ‘cuz he ran and climbed a tree.

FRED: Yeah! But he kind of did that FLIGHT thing too because he ran away.
TRIXIE: Yeah! But you could also say he did that SELF MENTOR thing because he took care of himself. After all, you’re not gonna stand there and say, “Hey, Wild Boar, come and get me.” Instead you’re gonna FIGHT to save your life.

NICK: Like I said, he did that FIGHT thing.

MR. CAMPBELL: Good! Where on the continuum did the short man fall?

NICK: Well, I guess he did that FIGHT thing too ‘cuz he fought to save his life by diving into a hole.

FRED: Yup! He also FLIGHTED ‘cuz he ran from the Wild Boar, and he ran from the Tiger.

TRIXIE: Yeah! Plus he SELF MENTORED because he worked to save his own life.

MR. CAMPBELL: Excellent, Class! Now, Miss Debbie, back to you.

MISS DEBBIE: That was great! Now who has figured out why Sandy chose to tell me that story when I was stressing about what one of the other girls was doing?

RANDY: I bet I know. You were judging that other girl in a bad way just like the tall man was judging that short man in a bad way.

BILL: Yeah. Your friend was trying to get you to understand that you didn’t know her back story.

NICK: What do you mean by back story?

BILL: You know, the things that are going on in her life that caused her to act the way that she did.

MR. CAMPBELL: Can you give us an example, Bill?

Narrator: Bill hesitated for a moment. Then he said:

BILL: Well, it’s kind of like what happened to my cousin Samantha who lives in New Jersey. She was in the fifth grade. She made pretty good grades at the first of the year, but then she started making bad grades. She looked pretty healthy at the first of the year, but then she became almost anorexic. She started having a bunch of nightmares. She used to have a really great sense of humor. Suddenly, she would start crying for no reason at home. Her parents wanted to know what her back story was.
CATHY: Oh, I get it. Her back story is the explanation for why all those bad things were starting to happen.

BILL: Yeah.

CATHY: Did they find out?

BILL: Yeah, finally. She tried to kill herself by taking a bunch of pills.

Narrator 0: Several of the kids gasped. Cathy asked:

CATHY: Why?

BILL: It turns out that a bunch of kids had decided to bully her big-time. She couldn’t take it anymore.

CATHY: Is she okay?

BILL: They had to pump her stomach. They got her a counselor. They also moved her to a private school.

BONNIE: I’m glad she’s okay.

Narrator 0: Bill gave a sidelong look at first Judd and then Nick. Then he said:

BILL: Yeah, it’s not right for kids to bully other kids.

TRIXIE: You are exactly right. Bullying is NEVER okay.

MISS DEBBIE: I’m sorry about what happened to your cousin. I’m glad she’s getting help.

MR. CAMPBELL: Yes, Bill. I am glad as well. We appreciate you sharing your story.

MISS DEBBIE: When my friend Sandy told me the story of the Wild Boar, I realized that I had been judging that other girl without thinking about what triggered her to act in the way she did.

Narrator 0: Looking at Bill, she said:

MISS DEBBIE: I didn’t know her back story. The take-away, for me, was that I shouldn’t judge people.

MR. CAMPBELL: It’s like that old Native American saying about don’t judge other people until you have walked a mile in their moccasins.

MISS DEBBIE: Exactly. Let’s take the example of a boy with a broken leg. If that boy got really grouchy, what would you think?

DAPHNE: I’d figure that he was acting grouchy because his leg hurt.
MISS DEBBIE: Exactly! So his ‘tiger in the hole’, so to speak, is having a broken leg.

MR. CAMPBELL: Everybody has a back story, as Bill stated. That back story is their ‘tiger in the hole’, so to speak. Everybody has a reason, a motivation, that causes them to act in the way that they do. Some ‘tigers in the hole’ are really obvious like a cast on a broken leg. But some ‘tigers in the hole’ are more hidden, known only to that person.

MISS DEBBIE: Would anybody care to share what your ‘tiger in the hole’ would be?

Narrator 2: The next four kids, Nick, Blake, Doug, and Martha, only think their answer since they don’t have the courage to share their answer out loud.

NICK: I guess my ‘tiger in the hole’ are my two big brothers bullying me, my Dad being gone, and my Mom having to work all the time. No way am I gonna tell anybody about all that.

BLAKE: I guess my ‘tiger in the hole’ is Nick. I’m kind of afraid that if I don’t help him be a bully, he might turn around and bully me. Of course, Nick wasn’t at my elementary school. I just had a bunch of bad stuff going on at home. That bad stuff was my ‘tiger in the hole’ that caused me to bully Jordy and a bunch of other kids.

DOUG: My ‘tiger in the hole’ is my name. Back in elementary school, that substitute teacher read my name wrong off the roll sheet. She said, “Doug Dumb. Doug Dumb??” Oh, Doug Dunn. Sorry about that, Doug.” After that, it seemed like the whole school would call me Doug Dumb or Doug Dumbbell.

I wonder if Miss Debbie ever had kids call her Debbie Dumb instead of Debbie Dunn? I’d like to ask, but I don’t want to get the kids started calling me by that name again. I’ll just keep quiet.

MARTHA: My ‘tiger in the hole’ is my shyness. I have trouble speaking up in class thanks to kids like Barbara Bailey. Just like ‘mean girl’ Abby Reed when I was in elementary school, both girls make me feel stupid. Thank goodness this is the only class I have with Barbara and none with Abby. It feels good that Mr. Campbell makes certain that his class is a safe zone from put-downs and bullying. Too bad he can’t control the kids in the hallway.

Narrator 2: Trixie is the first kid to have the courage to share her answer out loud.

TRIXIE: My ‘tiger in the hole’ is my little sister. She’s always sneaking into my room, trying on my clothes, and breaking things ‘cuz she’s so clumsy. She really drives me crazy sometimes.
FRED: I guess my ‘tiger in the hole’ is my big sister. She’s a lot older and treats me like I’m her kid instead of her younger brother. She’s always bossing me around and treating me like I’m two years old instead of thirteen. She drives me crazy as well.

MR. CAMPBELL: How many of you have siblings or cousins or neighbors that feel like your ‘tiger in the hole’; in other words, your back story for why you feel stressed some of the time?

Narrator: Almost every kid in the room raised their hand.

Narrator: Bill had been debating with himself whether he had the courage to speak up. Glancing at the FIGHT-FLIGHT-FREEZE-SELF MENTOR continuum, he decided he would do a combination of that FIGHT option and that SELF MENTOR option. He said:

BILL: I guess my ‘tiger in the hole’ is what happened to my cousin. I gotta admit that last year, I saw a lot of bullying going on. I didn’t do anything or say anything to stop it because I was kind of afraid that the bullying would happen to me. Now, I don’t care anymore. I’m not gonna snitch or anything, but I am going to stand up big-time for others who get bullied.

Narrator: Nick stirred uncomfortably. He felt like a lot of eyes were staring at him. His friend Blake stirred uncomfortably as well. Mr. Campbell said:

MR. CAMPBELL: Good for you, Bill. By the way, Class, this seems like a good moment to discuss RESPONSIBLE REPORTING. Who can tell me what is the difference between snitching and RESPONSIBLE REPORTING?

CATHY: I think snitching is when you purposely try to get somebody in trouble. For example, when I was younger, I was really competitive with my older brother. He would tattle on me and try to get me in trouble with our parents. I would tattle on him and try to get him in trouble with our parents. My parents never knew who to believe. Since I was the girl and knew how to do that fake crying real well, they usually ended up believing me.

Narrator: The class laughed in understanding. Mr. Campbell asked:

MR. CAMPBELL: When is it important to tell an adult what you see?

RANDY: When somebody brings a gun to school. We sure don’t want to have a school shooting here.
MR. CAMPBELL: Excellent. So if you tell an adult that somebody brought a gun to school, that would be considered RESPONSIBLE REPORTING instead of snitching. After all, you are not purposely trying to get them in trouble. You are simply trying to keep you, your classmates, and the teachers safe.

MISS DEBBIE: If you see bullying going on and you tell an adult about that bullying, do you consider that snitching or RESPONSIBLE REPORTING?

Narrator 0: The class looked around uncomfortably. Mr. Campbell said:

MR. CAMPBELL: Let’s take a vote. How many of you think that if you tell an adult that you saw a kid being bullied - that that is snitching?

Narrator 0: Nick, Judd, Blake, and a few other kids guilty of frequent bullying all raised their hands.

MR. CAMPBELL: Let’s take Bill’s cousin as an example. If someone told an adult that Samantha was getting bullied so badly that her grades were going down, she was losing weight, she was having nightmares, and she was thinking about killing herself, how many of you would consider that tattling?

Narrator 0: This time, Judd was the only kid who raised his hand. Mr. Campbell asked:

MR. CAMPBELL: How many would consider that to be RESPONSIBLE REPORTING?

Narrator 0: Several kids in the class raised their hands. Mr. Campbell said:

MR. CAMPBELL: I would like to urge you all to understand that if you see bullying going on in our school, it is your responsibility to try to stop it in some positive way. If that doesn’t work, then I would urge you to tell the guidance counselor, a teacher you trust, the school resource officer, or the principal. Telling an adult about bullying is not snitching. It is RESPONSIBLE REPORTING. I realize that it will take a lot of courage to do this, but there have been too many kids in this country who have either tried to kill themselves or actually killed themselves due to being bullied. Bullying needs to be stopped.

MISS DEBBIE: I see that the bell is about to ring. I want to thank you all for being great listeners and participators in today’s discussion.

MR. CAMPBELL: Let’s give Miss Debbie a hand for her performance.

Narrator 0: The class clapped enthusiastically just as the dismissal bell rang.